

[27th March 1922]

IX

PROROGATION OF THE COUNCIL.

His Excellency the GOVERNOR, in proroguing, addressed the Council as follows:—

“Mr. President and hon. Members of the Madras Legislative Council,—

“Before proroguing the Council, I am very glad, as head of the Government, to have this opportunity of thanking hon. Members for the assistance they have given us in the work of the administration of our Presidency during the past year, and of congratulating hon. Members warmly on the sense of responsibility they have shown in carrying out their important duties.

“I think we may all feel that the good ship ‘Reforms’ has fairly successfully completed her maiden voyage, and though I think we have discovered already that certain alterations in her structure require to be made in order that she may prove to be a more sea-worthy vessel, still the skipper can very truly say that he would have found the difficulties of navigation much greater if it had not been for the loyal and devoted work of the whole of the crew.

“It has been a matter of much regret to the Government that we have been unable to carry out the full programme of legislation that I outlined when I addressed hon. Members at the beginning of the session, but our time has been much occupied by the various disturbing influences of which hon. Members are well aware, and it has been found quite impossible to undertake all the rather comprehensive programme which I then hoped we might complete. I trust, however, that the coming year may be productive of peace and good-will among all communities in all parts of the Presidency, and that Government may be able next session to bring forward important measures of legislation which will help towards the better administration of our province.

“It is hardly necessary for me to refer to the serious nature of the financial situation, for hon. Members have probably, during the past month while the budget has been under discussion, had this matter constantly before their mind, but I wish generally to express my keen satisfaction at the manner in which hon. Members have exercised their powers in regard to the various proposals which have been laid before them, and assure them that Government will abide by the decisions which have been arrived at by the votes of the majority of the Council (cheers). There are one or two points, however, which I should like to refer to which have come to my notice during the budget debate. I observe that hon. Members have decided on a reduction in the amount proposed for expenditure on the Publicity department. I only refer to this matter in order to say that if the reason for that reduction lies in the fact that hon. Members intend to do much more publicity and propaganda work themselves among their constituents (laughter) during the recess which I much hope and have often urged, then there is every justification in the action which they have taken on this head.

“But another matter is one which is to my mind of such far-reaching importance if it is allowed to develop that I venture to deal with it fully and make certain suggestion to hon. Members which I am sure they will

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accept as given by me in the best interests of the working of the Council itself and of that intelligent control over the Government in financial matters which the Council is expected to exercise.

"Under the Instrument of Instructions there is laid upon the Governor the following duty, viz., 'to ensure the probity of public finance and the solvency of the Presidency.' There is, I need hardly say, no question of the probity of the financial administration, but the solvency of the Presidency is one as regards which I and my Government have had many searchings of heart. I need not recapitulate the financial history of the last few years. We started with great expectations, based upon what appeared to be the firmest of foundations, and with the full approval of the Council of the day proceeded at the close of the war to try to make up leeway with the aid of the balances that had been accumulated during the war. Not only, however, have we lost our expected increase, we have lost in addition a very large part of the revenue which we thought was already ours; and we have had to ask the Council to assent to taxes to meet the deficit. Hon. Members have passed some of these and while they have rejected others, they have still insisted upon the incurring of the expenditure which they were designed to meet. I do not propose in any way to interfere with the action the Council have taken, but in view of the instruction to me to safeguard the solvency of the Presidency, I feel bound to sound a note of warning.

"I know it will be replied to me that the Council's idea is that solvency should be secured by stringent economy. I do not contest that proposition. But I do ask hon. Members to realize that if they, having the power of the purse, consider that that is the only way by which to attain solvency then it is for them to put forward and carry the measures necessary to that end. I lay stress on this point, because, although as many as 794 resolutions have been moved on the budget, most of them dealing with points of detail, I have noticed that there has been a general tendency to withdraw these resolutions after discussion, but to press and carry only a small number which involve lump deductions from total grants. Now, I venture to say to the Council that this is not a correct procedure. It has been suggested that it is a desirable one because it gives the Government discretion to make such reductions as they think fit, and I know it may be argued that this is a principle which has been adopted in other Legislative Assemblies in India. As the head of the Government, I must say that I cannot accept either of these arguments. We have carefully examined the budget and put forward what appeared to us to be the minimum demands necessary for carrying on the administration. It is open to the Council in the exercise of their responsibility and their power of the purse, if they consider any details of these demands excessive, to reduce them or cut them out, but I do not think that it is proper to ask the Government, who regard the whole as essential, to choose which of the essentials they will do without.

"I think hon. Members will agree that the object of budget discussion is to give the opportunity to any member of moving to reduce or cut out individual items under any head of the budget and take the responsibility for it himself. The danger of these omnibus reductions is that, if the system is permitted to develop, they would cause the budget discussion to deteriorate into a scramble for lump sum deductions; that the Government

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would be tempted to ask for more than what they need so as to meet the contingency of omnibus reductions, and that the interest in and the educative value of budget discussion would suffer and the consequences would be more far-reaching than is probably now realized.

"I have expressed myself fully and freely to hon. Members on this matter and am sure they will accept such advice as I have ventured to give in the spirit in which it is given as coming from one who is eager and anxious as I have already said, for the best interests of the future working of our Council. (Applause.)

"The reasons for our large deficit are, as hon. Members are aware, mainly three in number. In the first place, the very great cost of the increase in salaries particularly among the more low-paid officials owing to the general increase in prices during the past few years; in the second place the loss of revenue that has occurred owing to the violent activities of the non-co-operation propaganda and in the third place the payment of Rs. 3½ crores to the Central Government under the arrangement which has been forced on us notwithstanding our strongest protests as a result of the report of Lord Meston's Financial Relations Committee. The effect of this adverse financial position has necessarily been the postponement of many projects which would be of great advantage to the people, a practical stoppage of much necessary development in all departments. I need hardly say that this has been most disappointing not only to myself and to every member of my Government but to departmental officers as well, and very especially to my hon. Colleagues, the Ministers, who are in charge of most of the developing departments, and to whom it has been a very great blow that in the first year of the life of the Reforms scheme they who control the transferred departments have been unable to start many schemes which I know well they are eager and anxious to develop. I trust we may see an improvement in the financial situation during the coming year; hon. Members may rest assured that Government will do everything in their power to secure that desirable end.

"I must refer, having regard to recent happenings, to the position of Government in regard to the non-co-operation movement.

5 p.m.

I can assure hon. Members that Government have no desire to take drastic action against any one, but law and order must be maintained, in order that the law-abiding citizen may feel safe and secure in carrying on his ordinary avocations. I wish, however, to point out how extraordinarily difficult is the position of Government in a matter of this sort. It really seems to be this. If any dangerous outbreak occurs owing to the activities of any revolutionary agitators, Government are taken severely to task for not having taken strong action to prevent it; but if that strong action is taken, they are told that the moment for such action is inopportune and that it will have disastrous consequences. The difficulty of our position is very much evidenced at the present time. I think that the firm action which Government has taken with regard to civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes has been generally approved; but when the prime-mover and leader of that policy is arrested, action which I consider to have been amply justified and which Mr. Gandhi appears to think fully justified himself, it appears from what I read in the press that in several quarters the arrest is considered most impolitic and undesirable. I can but say that it is impossible

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for Government to be on both sides of the fence at the same moment. We believe that law and order must be firmly maintained, we are acting up to that belief and expect to receive the support of all law-abiding and peace-loving citizens in our efforts to take a straightforward course to that end. And we are also firmly of the opinion that, while the revolutionary agitation of non-co-operators with all its resultant destruction of property and bloodshed, while their persistent and ill-mannered efforts to minimise the good effects of the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, have created an unfortunate impression as to the state of India in the minds of my countrymen in England, the vast majority of the people of India are true and loyal to the British Throne, and we are clear that these unfortunate incidents should not deter us from pressing forward towards the achievement of India's ambition, absolutely equal partnership in the commonwealth of nations that make up the great British Empire. (Cheers.)

"But this ambition, I am convinced, will never be achieved unless we are all determined to work together in a spirit of loyal co-operation and goodwill, and with this in my mind may I ask the Council to exercise forbearance in the discussion of questions relating to the services, both English and Indian, whether inside this House or out of it? I am sure hon. Members do not bear the services any ill-will, in fact, that there exist the best of feelings between many members of this Council and members of the services with whom they have come into contact. But I do ask them to consider what may be the effect in small stations in the mufassal of brief, and perhaps not too accurate, reports of statements made in controversy here which all of us who hear them understand. Members of the services have had much to unsettle them in changes in the system of control in the prospect of further change in the policy in which they were brought up in the absence of personal knowledge of their new masters and in numerous other ways. They are in certain quarters the subject of constant aspersion and attack, some of which may be justified if directed to the system, but which is quite unfair when applied to individuals, and above all their future is very uncertain. The Council need in this present year of stress the very best work they can secure from the trained officers, and I ask them to recognize that the best class of work will not be secured from men who are harassed by criticism, who feel that their efforts are not appreciated and who feel keenly this uncertainty as to their future. Believe me, I know what I am saying when I tell hon. Members that the European officers who are staying in India under the new constitution are out to help, that they are willing to give of their best in the future as they have done in the past, and having accepted the new order of things they are only too anxious to see the new machine running smoothly. I appeal to all therefore to be generous in their judgments of officers of Government to believe the best and not the worst, to look upon officials as friends and not enemies, and they on their part I know will be only too ready to respond in that spirit of goodwill and friendship for which I am now appealing.

"Before I conclude, I wish to refer to the departure to England of two of our highest officers of the Council, I refer to the President and to the Leader of the House, Sir Lionel Davidson. The departure of the former is, I am glad to say, only for a period of a few months, and he is going, accompanied by his Legislative Council Secretary, to gain knowledge at first hand of the procedure and methods of the Houses of Parliament. I am sure we all wish

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them a safe journey, and trust that they will return to us full of useful information which will increase the efficiency of the working of our Council. Sir Lionel Davidson is leaving us at the end of a service career extending over thirty-two years which he has devoted to the best interests of the administration of this Presidency. From his wide knowledge of the affairs of this Presidency and from his transparent sincerity and straight forwardness in all his actions (cheers), I can very truly say that I shall much miss his counsel and advice. I am sure every hon. Member would wish to join me in expressing our gratitude to him for his long and faithful service to our Presidency, and our hope that he may enjoy a well-earned rest from his labours and maintain his interest in the well-being of the people of this country among whom he has spent so many years of his life. (Cheers.)

"I hereby declare this Council prorogued and trust that hon. Members may enjoy rest and relaxation and return full of Vigour and energy to undertake their duties for the coming year." (Applause.)

At 5-10 p.m. the Council adjourned *sine die*.

L. D. SWAMIKANNU,
Secretary to the Legislative Council.

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TRUTH ALONE TRIUMPHS